

Israel went through 70 years of captivity and exile in Babylon and the Book of Ezra begins with their release to go back to Israel - out of exile. Leader Zerubbable and Priest Jeshua returned with a small remnant of people to Jerusalem and began to rebuild the temple of the Lord. They finished it and then temple sacrifices were restored. Between Ezra 6 and 7 are 58 years. The Book of Esther fits in this time. **Ezra 7:1** *Now after these things...* The lineage of Ezra needed to be traced and was significant because it determined Israel's possessions and their birthright. It shows a continuity in God's Word; it is one story; God has not stopped the work in His people. There is a continuity for us too - our lives are in this place that God might speak to us today.

Ezra 7 mentions "Ezra" for the first time. Ezra was a Levite, descended from Aaron, the High Priest. He was a young man and not old enough to be a priest (30). 70 years of captivity; 20 years to rebuild the temple; 58 years passed as God put a burden on Ezra's heart. Ezra was born outside of his homeland - in exile. God was speaking to him of something he had not seen.

Has God put something in your heart but your eyes can't see it or your mind can't understand? Put your faith in God for what He has put in your heart as God intends to fulfill.

God's people were not committed to worship. They had not prepared their hearts. Ezra takes to heart God's Word and steps out in faith to restore worship and the significance of God's Word. Theologians believe that Ezra was instrumental in organizing the Old Testament books. Synagogues were established as gathering places by Ezra to have a place for weekly teaching.

Ezra had an impact on God's people in Israel. **Ezra 7:10** *For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.* Ezra's actions teach us to: study the Word, practice the Word, and speak the Word. These are very important but more important: *Ezra had set his heart...* Quality and passion goes down when our hearts are not in it. We might be doing the right thing, but we also need our hearts to desire it.

Ezra set his heart.

Ezra 7:10a *For Ezra had set his heart...* Israel had a heart problem. They had pulled away from God's instructions and justified it. The first thing recorded with Ezra is his setting his heart to God. **Proverbs 4:23** *Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.* **Proverbs 27:19** *As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects man.* Jesus says, *For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.* Our words can edify or tear down, bring trust or fear, be harsh or encouraging, be edifying or destroying.

What is the condition of our hearts? What words do we use to describe others, spouses, children, or to speak to those around? What situation are you most struggling with today? What words are you using in your work place? We must begin by setting our hearts, rooting our hearts, on the things and desires of God.

Ezra set his mind.

Ezra 7:10 *... to study the law of the Lord...* He is speaking of the Torah, the first 5 books of the Old Testament. Ezra saw there were things to know to have a relationship with God. Revelation comes to those who study God's Word. Worship today is central to believers but needs to be understood, not mindless. Worship begins with centering our hearts on God's presence and person. We worship God as we know Him.

Psalms 119:9-11 *How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word. With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me wander from Your commandments. I have treasured Your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against You. Blessed are You, Lord; teach me Your statutes. With my lips I have told of all the ordinances of Your mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate on Your precepts and regard Your ways. I shall delight in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.*

We each know the secret places of our lives that we struggle with. We want and desire to be done with these things. But how? ... *by taking heed according to Thy Word. Seek God with your whole heart.* Ezra knew God's heart on each matter. We need to be daily in God's Word to know His heart. Are our prayers connected to God's heart or to our own desires? God will give us the desires of a heart that is submitted to Him. Ezra positioned his heart to study His Word. Begin reading His Word with a prayer that says, God, let our hearts be in accordance with Your Word.

Ezra set His actions.

Ezra 7:10 ... *and to practice it...* Do we try to do the right things without experiencing the One who calls us to change? God values our hearts! If you are exhausted trying to do the right things, give your heart to God. Let God change our inside and then our outer man will follow and be transformed. Actions are important but don't ignore the inner man. Leadership begins by serving those around us. Ezra served the people around him - it showed his heart for God.

James 1:22 *But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.*

When things aren't good, who are you listening to? Sometimes we listen to unwise words. Stop listening to those who are not speaking with God's Word. Ezra knows it is important to follow God's Word.

- First, Ezra got his heart in the right spot.
- Then he studied God's Word and set his mind.
- Then he began to live those things out.
- And finally, he speaks with authority.

Ezra set his words.

Ezra 7:10 ...*and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.* The weight of a man's word will be determined by the commitment that a person has to it. Begin by yielding your heart to God.

Jesus gave these words to His disciples... **Matthew 28:19-20** *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.* To preach doesn't mean to be a "preacher." Know that we are always preaching... by how we live, talk, react, respond... What is our life preaching to others? Wives, husbands, singles... what is the message of your heart?

Begin with a broken, humble heart before God. We are all given a commission to share what Jesus has done in us. It might not be big or explainable but trust Him with it and share it with others. Are you exhausted and worn out on an issue? At the end of a struggle? Confess and start with your heart. Ezra was successful because of where he placed his heart.

How are our prayers connected to God's heart or to our own desires?

How can your exhaustion on an issue in your life change?

Has God put something in your heart but your eyes can't see it or your mind can't understand?